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TITLE: Friend-To-Friend: A Model HIV/AIDS Prevention Program For Gay And Bisexual Men
In Washington State

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ISSUE: Men who have sex with men (MSM) still comprise the highest risk category for AIDS in Washington State and have reported substantial rates of unsafe sexual behavior. Yet, outside of Seattle few interventions were being implemented. The Friend-To-Friend Project (FTFP) was developed in 1995 to attempt to change the community norm around sexual safety among MSM throughout Washington State.

SETTING: MSM are recruited to participate in Friend-to-Friend through gay bars and gay social groups. The workshops take place in service settings, people's homes or a social setting.

PROJECT: The Friend-To-Friend intervention is founded on two key principles: 1) that explicit communication about sex and safer-sex methods reduces rates of unprotected anal intercourse and unprotected vaginal intercourse (UAI/UVI), and 2) that peer opinion leaders can change community norms to support safer-sex practices. The intervention is based on the diffusion of innovation theory and attempts to change the community norm through training sessions, which incorporate information about sexuality communication and HIV/AIDS prevention. The FTFP also implements and supports activities to help build community for MSM in small cities throughout Washington State.

RESULTS: 1,250 people have participated in workshops around the state. Participants consistently give the workshops high ratings. Over time the program has responded to community needs to include community-building activities. These activities and the continued workshops have become well established and valued programs for gay and bi men in their communities.

LESSONS LEARNED: It is possible and effective to develop a community-wide intervention for MSM outside of urban centers. In order for long-term programs to remain viable, they must adapt to changes in the community while also striving to maintain the essential theoretical core of the model.

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